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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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ADDIS FOR AMBASSADOR COURVILLE
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SUBJECT: FORMER COMORAN PRESIDENT AZALI POSITIONS HIMSELF

REF: ANTANANARIVO 212

11. (SBU) With increasing political and military activity in the Union of the Comoros (REFTEL), former Union President Assoumani Azali has stepped up his communication with Embassy Antananarivo. The latest was a statement from his political party, the Convention for the Renewal of the Comoros (CRC), stating its vehement opposition to using military action to resolve the conflict on Anjouan.

12. (U) The statement notes that for two countries in the region, Kenya and the Comoros, with conflicts emanating from electoral issues, the African Union (AU) and the international community at large are choosing to handle them in two completely different ways. The CRC asks why the AU is pursuing dialogue at all costs for Kenya (a powerful and important country), while the AU is choosing to make the Comoros (a small country with no resources) a new "experimental camp" for settling intra-state matters by African force. The CRC argues the international community is giving way to Union President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi's clear manipulation, noting diplomats are saying much about the illegal actions of some separatist "rebels" on Anjouan but little about Sambi's authoritarian bungling of the elections. Stories of torture on Anjouan are being exaggerated for public relations purposes, but no one talks about Sambi's violation of human rights, the CRC states. According to the statement, Sambi's personal guards are arresting and beating up whomever they please, tracking down opponents, refusing pluralism and restricting the media. The CRC also vehemently denounces the irrational and chaotic handling of the crisis by Sambi and the international community, the AU in particular. The statement asks - how is it that one of the most powerful AU members, South Africa, has not been taking part in the most recent meetings to resolve the problem? Finally, the CRC questions under which mandate AU forces will intervene militarily, as they have no mandate from the UN Security Council. The statement closes by encouraging further rounds of negotiations, based on the Fomboni and Beit Salam accords, to resolve the problem.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: Colonel Azali seized power in a bloodless coup in April 1999, overthrowing Interim President Tadjidine Ben Said Massoude, who he saw as pandering to the independence movement on Anjouan. Azali's motives at this time are unclear, but it is entirely possible that in the revolving door of Comoran politics, he is trying to position himself in case Sambi fails to manage the crisis Anjouan. The CRC's statement was an eloquent articulation of the opposition's position, but it ignores the key difference between Kenya and the Comoros. In the Comoros, there is no ambiguity that

Sambi is the President of the Union and that Colonel Mohamed Bacar seized power of Anjouan in sham elections condemned across the international community. After more than nine months of failed attempts at negotiation and dialogue with Bacar, the AU concluded the time for discussions are over. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT